

Are you a slumper?

Ashley Seager was, but cured bad posture – and her chronic back pain – with the Alexander technique

Many people will have heard of the Alexander technique but have only a vague idea what it is about. Until earlier this year, I didn't have the faintest idea about it. But, hunched over a computer screen one day, I noticed that the neck- and backache I regularly suffered were more painful than usual. I consulted an osteopath, who said: 'I can treat the symptoms by massaging your neck and upper back. But you actually have bad posture. That is what you need to get sorted out. Go off and learn the Alexander technique.'

I had regularly been told by friends and family that I tend to slouch in chairs but had thought bad posture was something one was born with and could do nothing about. That is not true. Dentists and car mechanics, among others, tend to develop bad posture from leaning over patients or engine bays. Mothers often stress and strain their necks and backs lifting and carrying children, and those of us who sit in front of computers all day are almost certainly not doing our bodies any favours.

A few clicks on the web and I found an Alexander technique teacher, Tanya Shoop, in my area of south London and booked a first appointment. Three months later I am walking straighter and sitting better, while my neck and back pain are things of the past. I feel taller, too, which I may be imagining, but the technique can increase your height by up to five centimetres if you were badly slumped beforehand.

The teaching centres on the neck, head and back. It trains you to use your body less harshly and to perform familiar movements and actions with less effort. There is very little effort in the lessons themselves, which sets apart the Alexander technique from pilates or yoga, which are exercise-based.

A typical lesson involves standing in front of a chair and learning to sit and stand with minimal effort. You spend some time lying on a bench with your knees bent to straighten the spine and relax your body while the

teacher moves your arms and legs to train you to move them correctly.

The key is learning to break the bad habits accumulated over years. Try, for example, folding your arms the opposite way to normal. It feels odd, doesn't it? This is an example of a habit the body has formed which can be hard to break. Many of us carry our heads too far back and tilted skywards. The technique teaches you to let go of the muscles holding the head back, allowing it to resume its natural place on the summit of our spines. The head weighs four to six kilos, so any misalignment can cause problems for the neck and body.

The Alexander technique teaches you to think of the space above your head. This may sound daft, but it is an important element in the process of learning to hold yourself upright. You learn to observe how you use your body and how others use theirs – usually badly. Look how a colleague slumps back in a chair with his or her legs crossed. That puts all sorts of stresses and strains on the body. Even swimming can harm the neck. The Alexander technique can teach you to swim better, concentrating on technique rather than clocking up lengths. 'In too many of our activities we concentrate on how we get to a destination rather than the means or way of getting there,' says Shoop.

So who was Alexander and how did he come up with the technique? Frederick Matthias Alexander, an Australian theatrical orator born in 1869, found in his youth that his voice was failing during performances. He analysed himself and realised his posture was bad. He worked on improving it, with dramatic results. He brought his technique to London 100 years ago and quickly gathered a following that included some very famous people. He died in 1955, having established a teacher-training school in London, which is thriving today.

So if you are slouching along the road one day, feeling weighed down by your troubles, give a thought to the Alexander technique. It could help you walk tall again.

- 13 The writer learnt about the Alexander technique
- A after telling someone about her problems.
 - B when she suddenly developed a bad back.
 - C when massage failed to alleviate her back pain.
 - D after a doctor told her she had bad posture.
- 14 The writer had been
- A concerned that her neck and back problems were caused by bad posture.
 - B under the impression that poor posture was innate and could not be rectified.
 - C aware that she had problems similar to those experienced by car mechanics.
 - D uncertain about placing her trust in the Alexander technique.
- 15 The Alexander technique teaches that familiar movements
- A have been learnt by incorrect methods.
 - B need more energy and effort than we think.
 - C do not have to be performed so strenuously.
 - D are the most common cause of backache.
- 16 It appears that the body forms habits that
- A inevitably cause physical pain.
 - B can be difficult to change.
 - C are a consequence of actions we perform.
 - D develop in early childhood.
- 17 The Alexander technique
- A makes you aware of other people's faults.
 - B has immediate and dramatic results.
 - C helps athletes perform better.
 - D brings about a change in body posture.
- 18 It is suggested that Frederick Alexander
- A believed in the benefits of exercise.
 - B invented an alternative to yoga.
 - C developed a form of exercise for actors.
 - D recovered his vocal powers.
- 19 What is the writer's main purpose in the article?
- A to recommend regular physical exercise
 - B to explain how debilitating backache can be
 - C to suggest that back problems can be remedied
 - D to explain the widespread occurrence of back pain

Flying in Style

(0) days commercial airliners are becoming larger,
(13) makes flying cheaper but in many ways more impersonal. Perhaps (14) a response to this, a more old-fashioned way of taking to the air is gaining popularity in Britain.
(15) number of companies today offer charter flights in small aircraft. You hire the plane and pilot, just as you might hire a chauffeur-driven car, and (16) are yours for the day.

If you are flying on a short trip (17) Britain to the continent, a light plane can get you (18) almost as quickly as a jet airliner. In fact, the whole journey takes far (19) time, since you don't need to be at the airport hours (20) advance. And if you share the cost with friends, it can be cheaper than a scheduled flight.

The atmosphere (21) board is relaxed and friendly, with formalities (22) passport control and customs, if not entirely eliminated, at least kept (23) a minimum. Instead of walking for (24) seems like miles through a vast airport terminal, (25) it's time to take off, you simply stroll over and ease (26) into the plane. Even the flight itself is more fun, as (27) as the weather is fine. And if you want to descend and take a closer look at something on the ground, just ask the pilot; you're the boss!

Black Widow Spider

The black widow spider's (0) is not without foundation. However, an element of exaggeration has led to certain (28) regarding its evil nature.

NOTORIOUS

CONCEPT

Firstly, this spider is not as dangerous as is often thought. While it is indeed one of the most (29) species of spider, its venom being fifteen times stronger than that of the prairie rattlesnake, its bite injects such a small amount of venom by (30) that it is unlikely to kill humans. In fact, (31) are rare.

VENOM

**COMPARE
FATAL**

Black widows bite only if they are touched or their web is threatened. Furthermore, only the adult female is poisonous. Those most at risk from the female are the spider's natural prey – insects – and male black widow spiders. The latter are vulnerable as the female is (32) by nature, and has been known to kill and eat the male after mating. Such (33) are rare, but they explain how the spider got its name – and its reputation.

SOLITUDE

OCCUR

Nevertheless, the (34) effects of this spider's bite should not be (35) , and if you live in a temperate climate and have a fireplace in your home, it is advisable to take (36) Black widow spiders often inhabit wood piles, so you should wear gloves when handling firewood. Furthermore, since black widow spiders are (37) to many insecticides, you should regularly clean out likely hiding places.

**PLEASE
ESTIMATE**

CAUTION

RESIST

Example:

- 0 ● We will do all the work, but they will all the credit, as usual!
- She will offence if you tell her that hairstyle doesn't suit her.
- They threatened to David to court unless he stopped playing his drums all night.

0	TAKE	0
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Write **only** the missing word **IN CAPITAL LETTERS** on the separate answer sheet.

- 38 ● The college offers a wide of courses, from business studies to hair styling.
- We looked out of the plane window as we flew over the of mountains.
- The bird is just out of of my binoculars, so I can't make out what species it is.
- 39 ● Sally on her soup to cool it down.
- A sudden gust of wind out the candle.
- They were making counterfeit money, but somebody the whistle on them, and they got arrested.
- 40 ● There's a chance that she's still in her office, although she did say she was going out for lunch.
- Alicia has a small cottage on a island off the coast of Scotland.
- He was a cold, person, who was difficult to talk to, let alone get close to!
- 41 ● The project was going really well until we a snag, and that delayed us.
- Sue and Raymond really it off, and I'm delighted they liked each other!
- The old lady her attacker on the head with her walking stick.
- 42 ● George was so exhausted that he was in no to drive a car.
- Tanya has been training all winter, and she's in peak
- On no are children under ten allowed on this fairground ride.

Example:

0 Jane regretted speaking so rudely to the old lady.
MORE
Jane politely to the old lady.

0	WISHED SHE HAD SPOKEN MORE	0
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Write the missing words **IN CAPITAL LETTERS** on the separate answer sheet.

- 43 The police have issued a description of the man wanted in connection with the robbery.
BEEN
A description wanted in connection with last night's robbery.
- 44 I can't work because Joey won't leave me alone!
KEEPS
Joey I can't work!
- 45 'You really must stay and have dinner with us!' said Laura.
STAYING
Laura for dinner.
- 46 Alan split up with Julie because he couldn't stand her constant nagging.
WITH
Alan split up with Julie because he her constant nagging.
- 47 If you need me, call me any time, night or day.
MATTER
Call me if you need me, be.
- 48 I don't want to be disturbed at all this morning!
ACCOUNT
On disturbed this morning!
- 49 If Maurice hadn't told Beth about that letter, we wouldn't have argued.
FOR
Had telling Beth about that letter, we wouldn't have argued.
- 50 We're going to miss the start of the film if we don't hurry.
TIME
Unless we hurry, the film we get there.

Extract One

You hear part of an interview with a woman who has changed her lifestyle.

1 The idea for buying an olive farm came from

- A a contact in Greece.
 - B Kathy's husband.
 - C a site on the Internet.
- ☐

2 Kathy says she had expected to

- A miss her home and family in Britain.
 - B find life in Greece more difficult.
 - C feel nostalgic about her old job.
- ☐

Extract Two

You hear part of a radio discussion in which two teachers are talking about teaching poetry.

3 The man feels that generally poetry

- A is not taken seriously by teachers.
 - B is not a popular subject to teach.
 - C makes for an uninspiring lesson.
- ☐

4 The woman's main argument is that

- A teachers should encourage students to respond to poetry in their own way.
 - B students need guidance if they are to understand and appreciate poetry.
 - C only the poet can give us a valid interpretation of his or her work.
- ☐

Extract Three

You hear two people talking about an unusual kind of competition.

5 According to Jake, he stopped at the pub

- A out of curiosity.
 - B to eat something.
 - C to meet someone.
- ☐

6 The object of the competition is to

- A tell the most convincing lie.
 - B tell the funniest anecdote.
 - C tell the most obvious tall story.
- ☐